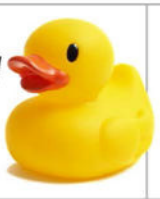
MULTI AWARD WINNING!

SCIENCE + ANIMALS + PUZZLES + PEOPLE + ARTS + PHOTOS + BOOKS + SPORTS + FAT MARMOT WEEK

THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS & FACTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

SPORTS
New champ in Softball World Series
p18

NEWS
Ducky Derby takes place in Chicago
p5



ARTS
Documentary about lions airs on TV
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August 21, 2026 • Vol. 7, Issue 331 • $7.99

Making sense of the world

THE WEEK Junior

THE BEST MAGAZINE FOR CURIOUS KIDS

SHOULD SCHOOL BE YEAR ROUND?

Is it time to update the calendar? Cast your vote in our big debate! p8

DID YOU KNOW?
Every month, 3.9 billion people around the world use a Meta platform like Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp.

A main building at Meta's headquarters in Menlo Park, California

Survey about social media

In a new poll by Reuters news agency and Ipsos polling company, 61% of people said they favor stronger government oversight of social media companies. Additionally, 85% think social media can be addictive for children and that the platforms can be harmful for young people's mental health.

Record-setting fine against Meta

A court in New Mexico handed down a historic ruling against Meta on August 6, ordering the social media company to pay $567 million. Meta is the parent company of Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms.

What was the case?

In 2023, New Mexico's attorney general (state's top lawyer) sued Meta, claiming the company had knowingly harmed children's mental health. The case had two phases. The first ended on March 24, 2026, when a jury determined that Meta had misled users about the safety of its platforms and did not adhere to its own protocols, including a ban on users under age 13. Meta was ordered to pay a $375 million fine. The second phase of the trial was decided on August 6 by Judge Bryan Biedscheid without a jury. It focused on whether Meta's platforms created a public nuisance (behavior that affects someone else's health or well-being and is considered illegal under certain conditions) in the state.

Bryan Biedscheid

What happened in this phase?

In his decision, Biedscheid said that Meta's platforms were a public nuisance and compared them to a factory that releases pollution into the community. He ordered Meta to put $567 million into a fund that will be used to address harms its apps cause to young people. Of that amount, $420 million will go toward treatment services for children and teens who have been negatively affected by social media, with the rest covering awareness campaigns, prevention programs, and other costs over five years. The company must identify which users are in New Mexico and implement stronger safety measures there, including improved age verification and a time limit of 90 hours a month for young users. Meta is also barred in New Mexico from sending push notifications to users under age 18 between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Why is this significant?

The fine set by Biedscheid is the largest financial penalty ever imposed on Meta, and state officials called it "one of the most significant rulings ever issued against a social media company." The fine is in addition to the penalty set by the jury in March, bringing the total penalty to the company to $942 million. Thousands of families and school districts and more than 40 states have brought similar cases against Meta. Legal experts say the New Mexico decision will influence other cases seeking to force change on the company.

How did people react?

Meta spokesperson Andy Stone said the company will appeal the decision. "We work hard to keep people safe on our platforms," he said in a statement. "We...will continue to defend ourselves against claims that misrepresent the facts." Raúl Torrez, New Mexico's attorney general, applauded the ruling. "Today's decision is a victory for every parent who has worried about what social media is doing to their child and every child who deserves to grow up safer online," Torrez said in a statement. Some experts on the effects of social media said the decision did not go far enough. They called for stronger action against infinite scroll, autoplay of videos, and other platform features. Children's health experts encouraged adults to talk to young people about the risks of social media.

What will happen next?

Meta will file its appeal while also facing additional lawsuits. Some online safety advocates said they hope the ruling will push Congress (the branch of government that makes laws) to adopt federal rules, rather than leaving states to rely on the varied results of many different lawsuits.

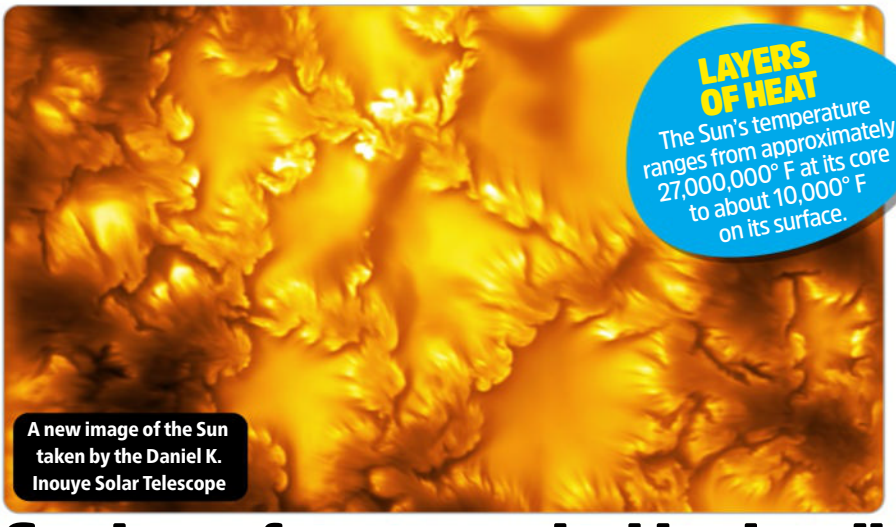
Nations sign defense pact

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan formalized a pact on August 7 to protect one another from foreign attacks. The deal, called the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, states that an attack on one of the countries would be an attack on all three. The move comes as conflict grows in the Middle East, due in part to the war between Iran and the US and Israel. Fighting has expanded to neighboring countries, including Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which are in the Middle East, and Pakistan, which is in South Asia, are powerful countries with individual strengths. Saudi Arabia is a top oil exporter. Turkey has a huge military, while Pakistan has nuclear weapons. Although the full details of the pact were not made public, the nations said it was designed to strengthen security and deter future conflicts.

They said the deal did not represent hostility toward any other country or interfere with any existing agreements. And other nations "seeking peace, prosperity, and stability in our region" are welcome to join, Turkey's president said.

Leaders of the three countries



LAYERS OF HEAT
The Sun's temperature ranges from approximately 27,000,000° F at its core to about 10,000° F on its surface.

A new image of the Sun taken by the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope

Sun's surface revealed in detail

On August 5, scientists released the highest-resolution images ever taken of the Sun, revealing details of its surface that have never been seen before. The images have helped researchers answer long-standing questions about the Sun's surface, which is roiling with swirling plasma (very hot gas that is electrically charged).

The images and video were captured by the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope, the largest of its kind, in Hawaii. An international team of scientists analyzed them and spotted swirling, whirlpool-like patterns on the Sun's surface. Using computer simulations, they confirmed that the patterns were evidence of a natural phenomenon called a Kelvin-Helmholtz instability (KHI). Experts previously believed that KHIs occurred on the Sun, but this is the first proof of the theory.

KHIs occur throughout nature, when two fluids flow past each other at different speeds. They can appear in clouds or in lakes and ocean waves. On the Sun, KHIs are caused by flowing plasma on areas of the surface with a strong magnetic field.

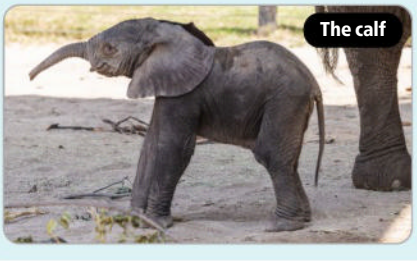
The team said KHIs on the Sun could cause a buildup of magnetic energy that is released as solar flares, which can disrupt satellites and power grids on Earth. Energy generated by KHIs could also explain why the outer part of the Sun's atmosphere, called the corona, is about 3,600,000° F hotter than its surface.

"The discovery of Kelvin-Helmholtz instability will serve as a basis for future discoveries," said David Boboltz, deputy director at the National Solar Observatory. The findings could also help scientists understand how other stars work.

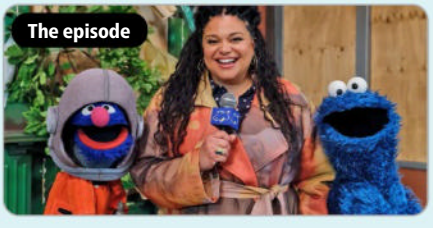
IT'S AN AMAZING WEEK FOR...

AN ADORABLE ARRIVAL

A baby African elephant was born at the Dallas Zoo in Texas. The male calf weighed about 230 pounds at birth and received a warm welcome from his mother and the herd. "Our team is celebrating every milestone," the zoo said.



The calf



The episode

A SPECIAL EPISODE

In "Storm on Sesame Street," a new episode of the beloved children's series, Elmo and friends put aside their fears to help neighbors during a big storm. The show's creators said it will help young people facing extreme weather be brave and remember that "children are resilient too."

HONORING A STAR

A new Barbie doll pays tribute to superstar singer Whitney Houston, the most awarded female artist of all time. Houston sold more than 220 million records and also supported numerous charitable causes. She died in 2012. Mattel, which makes Barbie, said the doll honors Houston's "legacy of award-winning music, cultural impact, and philanthropy."

The doll

ON THE COVER: GETTY IMAGES (3); NCLI; ON THIS PAGE: NSF/NSO/AURA/MPS; GETTY IMAGES; THE DALLAS ZOO; ZACH HYMAN — NETFLIX; MATTEL; ON LEFT PAGE: FACEBOOK; SANTAFENEWMEXICO.COM; GETTY IMAGES

WOW! Washington, DC, has about 693,600 residents, but its daytime population increases to about 1 million due to workers and visitors.

A rendering of the arch

White House update

A federal appeals court ruled on August 7 that President Donald Trump can't authorize the construction of a 90,000-square-foot ballroom at the White House (above). The court found that the $400 million project requires approval from Congress. Trump said he will appeal the decision to the US Supreme Court.

Controversy over proposed arch in DC

A new report by the National Park Service (NPS, the agency that manages US parks and monuments) found that a triumphal arch proposed by President Donald Trump would alter the way visitors experience and view dozens of historic sites in Washington, DC.

What is the proposed arch?

In 2025, Trump released renderings of a 250-foot-tall arch to be constructed to celebrate the 250th anniversary of America's independence. It would be located at Memorial Circle, a traffic island between the Lincoln Memorial, a monument that honors President Abraham Lincoln, and Arlington National Cemetery, a burial ground for US military veterans. The arch would be more than twice the height of the Lincoln Memorial, which is about 99 feet tall. It would be white with gilded (gold) details similar to those on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France, which stands at about 162 feet tall. A figure on top would resemble a winged Statue of Liberty and be flanked by two golden eagles.

What did the report find?

The NPS document listed 37 historic sites that it said would be negatively affected by the construction of the arch. It said that the significance of these properties in the nation's capital comes not only from their individual importance but from "their spatial, visual, symbolic, and ceremonial" relationships to one another. The report notes that the arch is taller than the capital's height limits allow and would change the skyline of the city.

What have other groups said?

As the White House reaffirmed its view that Memorial Circle is an ideal place to build an arch of this size, other groups have spoken out against it. For example, a group of military veterans has filed a lawsuit (legal dispute) to stop the arch's construction near Arlington National Cemetery. Other officials said the project has been rushed and needs more careful evaluation.

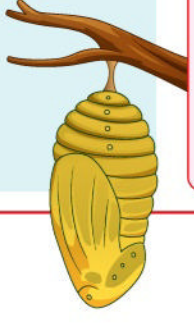
What will happen next?

The NPS has no authority to halt the project. Its report is meant to encourage a full review of the design. Before construction can begin, the plans require approval by the National Capital Planning Commission. Its chairman, a Trump appointee, said the panel could vote as early as September.

WORD OF THE WEEK

CHRYSALIS

The word "chrysalis" describes the hardened outer protective layer of the pupa of an insect, such as a butterfly or moth. It comes from the Greek *khrusos*, meaning "gold," because ancient observers noticed that many butterfly pupae had golden-flecked markings.



THE WEEK IN HISTORY

August 17, 1807

Steamboat begins public service

On August 17, 1807, the world's first steamboat began offering service to the public. It was designed by Robert Fulton and took passengers from New York City to Albany, New York, by traveling north on the Hudson River. Although the ship moved slowly at a rate of 5 miles per hour, it helped transform travel by creating a new way for people to get from one place to another.

The steamboat

Cereals to be free of food dyes

WK Kellogg announced that it will remove all artificial colors from its cereals by the end of 2026, one year earlier than it had previously planned. Instead of dyes, the food manufacturer will use fruit- and vegetable-based juices to give its popular cereals, such as Froot Loops (above) and Apple Jacks, their distinctive colors. Kellogg has already removed artificial colors from its cereals in other countries and has been under pressure to do the same in the US.

One of the contenders

Fat Marmot Week set to begin

The first-ever Fat Marmot Week will start on August 24. The bracket-style competition, overseen by the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Colorado, will feature eight yellow-bellied marmots that are bulking up on flowers and grasses to gain weight before they hibernate. Voting is taking place at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-FatMarmot, and the winning marmot will be announced on August 29.

Some of the rubber ducks

Ducky Derby held in Chicago

More than 90,000 rubber ducks were dumped into the Chicago River in Illinois on August 6 during the annual Ducky Derby. The event, which drew thousands of people who cheered for the ducks, raised more than $480,000 for Special Olympics Illinois. The funds will support the organization's mission to hold athletic competitions across the state for people with disabilities and special needs.

Erica Schwartz

Todd Blanche

Government officials are named

The US Senate (one half of Congress, the branch of government that makes laws) has confirmed two officials to oversee major US agencies. On August 5, Erica Schwartz was approved as the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, the US health protection agency). On August 8, Todd Blanche was approved as the nation's attorney general and will lead the Department of Justice (DOJ, the law-enforcement agency).

Schwartz is a physician and former US Navy rear admiral who served as the chief medical officer of the US Coast Guard. She is the first Black woman to lead the CDC. In 2019, she was appointed the nation's deputy surgeon general, a role she held until 2021. Her appointment to the CDC is significant because that agency had been without a permanent director for nearly a year. The secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who oversees the CDC, had removed the previous director, Susan Monarez, because they disagreed over childhood vaccine policies.

During Schwartz's confirmation process, senators questioned how she would protect the agency's scientific independence. Schwartz said she would provide health guidance to Americans by following "clear, honest, and evidence-based" research. She was confirmed by a vote of 51–44 and is expected to take her official oath of office later this month.

The previous attorney general, Pam Bondi, was fired by Trump in April. He then appointed Blanche to serve as acting attorney general in her place. From 2023 to 2025, Blanche worked as Trump's personal defense lawyer. As a result, some senators questioned whether Blanche would keep the DOJ independent from the office of the President. They also raised concerns about a controversial $1.8 billion fund that the DOJ had created in May after Trump pressed for it.

During the hearing, Blanche agreed to cancel the fund, which would've gone to Trump allies. This helped him receive enough support to be approved. He was confirmed by a vote of 50–49 and sworn in on August 10.

FACT FILE
About 2.6 million people work for a US department or agency within the federal government.

THE WEEK'S SILLIEST HEADLINE

"Iguana leaps out of box, gives FedEx store employees a scare" *UPI*

GETTY IMAGES (5); LAURA GREEN/ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIOLOGICAL LABORATORY; ON LEFT PAGE: HARRISON DESIGN/U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS; GETTY IMAGES (3)

Around the world

A sling was used to lift each whale.

Niagara Falls, Canada
Belugas move to new home

Seven beluga whales went on a 2,000-mile journey during the second phase of a plan to relocate 30 belugas from Canada's Marineland park after it closed. Experts transported the female whales in water-filled containers to SeaWorld San Antonio in Texas. They'll join a pod of 10 other belugas, including two males that were moved from Marineland in July. Keepers are providing special care to the new arrivals as they adapt to life in the US.

Applicants protested the decision.

Mexico
Thousands have to retake exams

About 58,000 students will be required to retake a college entrance exam due to concerns about cheating. The National Autonomous University of Mexico held its exam online for the first time, using cameras to monitor students remotely, but the results raised suspicions that many had cheated. In the past five years, 3.5% of applicants scored higher than 100 out of 120. This year, 16% did. Students will have to retake the test in person.

The ceremony

Bogotá, Colombia
Costumed activist becomes senator

One of Colombia's new lawmakers was sworn into office dressed as an elephant. Luis Carlos Rúa spent years campaigning against wasteful government projects, which are called white elephants, as the social media character Elefante Blanco (White Elephant). He revealed his true identity three days before the election. As a senator, Rúa says he'll save the costume "for specific occasions."

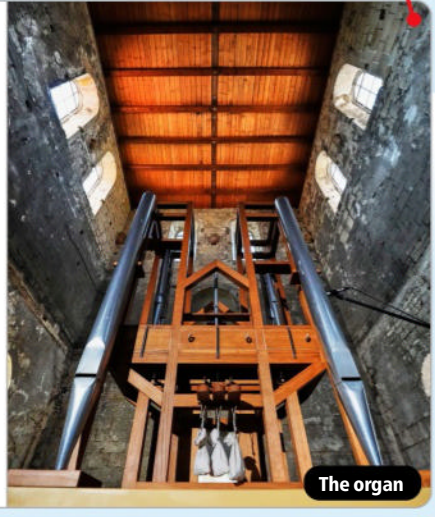
Sicily, Italy
Volcano erupts

Flights to Catania airport were canceled for several days after Mount Etna erupted on August 6. Etna, Europe's largest active volcano, is on the island of Sicily, a popular tourist destination. Because the eruption sent smoke and ash into the air, flights arriving at the airport on the eastern part of the island were suspended.

Mount Etna spewing ash

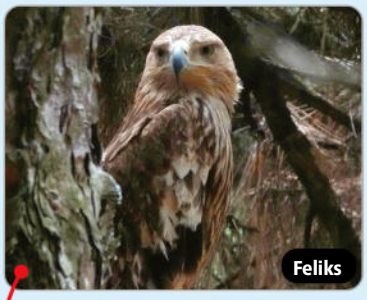
Halberstadt, Germany
Chord changes in long song

A pipe was added to an organ that has been playing the same song since 2001, causing the instrument to produce a new note for the first time in two years. The song, called "As Slow as Possible," was composed by John Cage and is thought to be the world's longest and slowest piece of music. The organ will now play this eight-note chord continuously until October 5, 2027, and the song is expected to end in the year 2640.


The organ

COURTESY SEA WORLD; A.P. GETTY IMAGES (5); KAZAKHSTAN'S MINISTRY OF ECOLOGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES; ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK

Around the world


Feliks

Subotica, Serbia
Rare eagle regains freedom

An imperial eagle that was kidnapped by illegal hunters is now free. Last year, Feliks left a nest in Serbia and flew to Syria, where he was captured. The hunters asked conservationists for money in exchange for releasing the rare bird, but his rescue was negotiated without payment. Feliks recovered at a wildlife center, then returned to the wild.

Umit's release

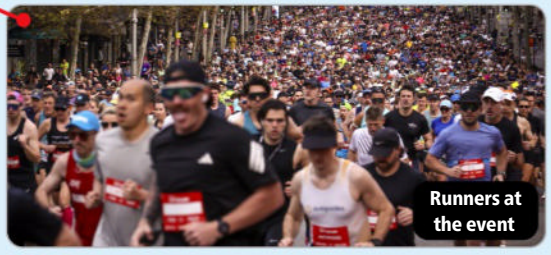
Balkhash, Kazakhstan
First tiger reintroduced

After years of habitat restoration and preparation, an Amur tiger named Umit was released into Kazakhstan's Ile-Balkhash Nature Reserve. Amur tigers are the closest living relatives of Caspian tigers, which used to live in Central Asia but were hunted to extinction in the 20th century. Umit, a female brought in from Russia, is the first wild-born tiger to live in the area in more than 70 years. Experts also plan to release a male tiger and two cubs.

A flooded road in Taizhou

China
Major storm causes floods

More than 1 million people left their homes as Typhoon Dolphin became the strongest tropical storm to make landfall in China this year. After hitting the Japanese island of Okinawa, the typhoon (hurricane) arrived in the city of Taizhou on China's east coast and weakened as it moved inland. It brought strong winds and heavy rain, flooding roads and homes as far north as the capital city, Beijing. Authorities worked to reduce damage.


Runners at the event

Sydney, Australia
World's largest fun run held

On August 9, the city of Sydney hosted the 56th annual City2Surf, the world's largest fun run (casual race). About 90,000 people ran the 8.7-mile course from Hyde Park to Bondi Beach, where they were greeted by tens of thousands of cheering spectators. Andy Buchanan was the first runner to cross the finish line at 40 minutes and 27 seconds.

Alexandra Eala with her trophy

Manila, Philippines
Historic tennis win

Alexandra Eala received a hero's welcome in her home country after she became the first player from the Philippines to win a tour-level Women's Tennis Association singles title. On August 3, Eala, age 21, beat top-ranked player Jessica Pegula to win the DC Open in the US. During the match, fans held signs reading: "You make us proud to be Filipino." Afterward, Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos Jr. honored Eala with an award and a party in Manila.

BACK TO SCHOOL 2026

Should kids attend school year-round?

Some people say that one long summer break does more harm than good.

What you need to know

- **Most states require about 180 days of school instruction each year, but schools get to choose when vacations start and end. Typically, US students break for winter holidays and get 10 to 12 weeks off in the summer.**
- **In the early 1900s, a few schools started replacing summer vacations with year-round instruction.**
- **By 2011, about 3,700 public schools had year-round class schedules.**
- **Today, about 2% of schools in the US are year-round.**

LOTS OF LEARNING
In the US in 2025, there were 5.7 million teachers and 54.1 million students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Most schools in the US start in August or September and end in May or June. But in some schools—and in other countries, like Japan, Australia, and Nigeria—classes take place throughout the year. Instead of one long vacation in the summer, there are smaller breaks during each term. Typical year-round schedules might include a 15-day break after every 45 school days, a 20-day break every 60 days, or a 30-day break every 90 days. Some education experts say students learn, remember, and achieve more that way. Others think kids are better off having their summers free. What do you think? Should kids attend school year-round?

Yes—it's a better balance

Over the summer, students tend to forget many things they learned during the school year. One study found that year-round students keep more of their knowledge from grade to grade, which adds up over the course of a child's education. And kids still get to take vacations—lots of them. Instead of working through a semester without much rest, students and teachers get time off more often, which is actually more refreshing. Year-round school is also better for working parents, who don't need to figure out what their kids will do during their long summer vacation and pay for expensive programs. That's a hardship for many families.

No—it's not worth it

Nobody knows for sure whether year-round instruction is better for learning, and the downsides are significant. Attending school all year means kids can't go to summer camps or play summer sports, and teens can't get summer jobs. Those activities are helpful for young people's development. Meanwhile, schools would have to use more electricity to keep their lights on and provide air-conditioning in hotter months, which is expensive for districts. Besides, summer vacation is an important tradition kids, families, and teachers look forward to. It shouldn't be taken away.

YES Three reasons kids should attend school year-round

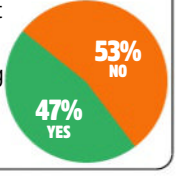
1. **Students forget class material over long summer breaks. Studying all year helps kids hold on to what they've learned.**
2. **Having shorter breaks more often is actually more refreshing.**
3. **Year-round school would be less of a hardship for parents who otherwise have to pay for summer programs.**

NO Three reasons kids should not attend school year-round

1. **Summer activities, such as camps and jobs, are important to many kids. Year-round school would interfere with that.**
2. **Schools would have to use more electricity to keep their buildings operating all year.**
3. **Summer vacation is a special tradition that shouldn't be taken away.**

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if kids should have to make their bed every day. It was a fairly close vote, with just under half of you preferring a tidy start to the day.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote YES if you think kids should attend school year-round or NO if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.

GETTY IMAGES

Setting records at sea

Kelsey Pfendler's lifelong love of the water inspired a historic adventure.

In July, Kelsey Pfendler made history by becoming the first American woman to row solo and unsupported across the mid–Pacific Ocean from California to Hawaii, totaling about 2,400 miles. At age 32, she is also the youngest and fastest person to finish the route alone, having completed it in 43 days, 17 hours, and 55 minutes.

Raised in Boonville, New York, Pfendler was a competitive swimmer during her childhood before discovering whitewater kayaking and rafting at age 18. She went on to become a professional river guide and has spent the past eight years leading rafting trips along the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon.

In 2024, Pfendler rowed in the World's Toughest Row–Pacific, a race in which teams row from California to Hawaii. The experience gave her the idea to complete the route solo. After two years of training, she set off from Monterey, California, on May 21. For company, she brought along two stuffed animals, Hugo the crab and Maury the octopus. She posted daily videos of her journey, which helped her raise more than $30,000 for the Grand Canyon river guiding community. When she arrived in Honolulu on July 3, hundreds of people were waiting to greet her.

Afterward, Pfendler urged others to take on challenges. "You might not think that you are strong enough to finish it right now, but you're definitely strong enough to start it, and you'll find everything else along the way," she told Hawaii Public Radio.

SILVER STAR

In 2022, Kelsey Pfendler competed at the World Rafting Championship in Bosnia, where her women's team finished second overall.

Kelsey Pfendler

Weaving a legacy

Margarita Mora, a 91-year-old master weaver from Venezuela, is preserving techniques passed down for centuries by Indigenous people (first to inhabit a place) and Spanish settlers living in the Andes Mountains. She first learned to weave at age 5, and she has spent decades crafting rugs and blankets with wool and native plant dyes on a wooden loom. She is passing her techniques on to the next generation by teaching local artisans at her home studio. Weaving "has kept me going all my life," Mora told *The New York Times*.

Margarita Mora

Steve Cherundolo

A new team leader

Steve Cherundolo has been named head coach of the US men's under-23 soccer team, which will compete at the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, California. Previously, he was the coach of Los Angeles FC, leading them to the 2022 Major League Soccer Cup championship. He spent 15 seasons playing for Germany's Hannover 96, and he appeared in three FIFA World Cups with Team USA. He called coaching Team USA a great honor and said he hopes to build an environment where the team can "challenge themselves, grow together, and represent our country with pride."

OVERHEARD

"When you fail, you actually win because you learn what not to do the next time."

Comedian and actress Tiffany Haddish on her advice to aspiring comics who are uncertain about getting started

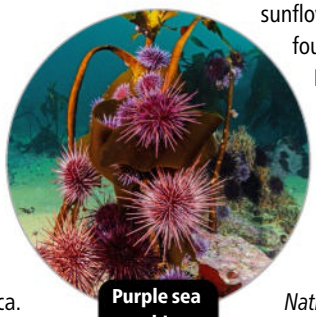
COURTESY OF WORLD'S TOUGHEST ROW; ANDREA HERNANDEZ/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; GETTY IMAGES (2)

A sunflower sea star

Rare sea star discovery offers hope

A group of sunflower sea stars has been found in the waters off the coast of Northern California, almost 10 years after experts feared the species had disappeared from the area. The discovery is exciting because sea stars play an important role in the survival of kelp, a type of seaweed (see box at right).

Sea stars are also known as starfish, although they are not actually fish. The sunflower sea star is the largest species of starfish on Earth—some grow to 3 feet wide. They eat other sea creatures, including purple sea urchins.


Purple sea urchins

Between 2013 and 2017, an illness known as sea star wasting disease killed an estimated 6 billion starfish off the Pacific coast of North America. About 90% of sunflower sea stars were wiped out, and the species was declared critically endangered. With their main predator no longer a major threat, the area's purple sea urchin population grew rapidly.

Purple sea urchins feed on kelp, and there were suddenly so many of them that they destroyed the area's underwater kelp forests. California's kelp forests provide food and shelter for nearly 800 species, including sea stars, sea otters, and sharks. The combination of the urchins' appetite and rising ocean temperatures has resulted in the loss of 90% of kelp forests in some waters along the West Coast of the US, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

After years of diving in the area looking for sunflower sea stars, scientists recently found 18 of the creatures. Tyler Mears, a diver with NOAA, said he felt as "stunned" to discover living sea stars as a paleontologist (scientist who studies fossils) would be to see a dinosaur.

Researcher Andrew Kim told *National Geographic* that finding wild sunflower sea stars is "an amazing opportunity to try to answer questions from the past" and to plan recovery efforts for the future. The discovery gives scientists new hope that they can restore the area's sea star population. This would bring the quantity of purple sea urchins back under control, giving kelp forests the chance to flourish again.

Precious underwater forests

There are 182 species of kelp living in oceans around the world. Many of these plants grow together in "forests" (above). Unlike trees, which can take hundreds of years to mature, kelp grows fast—up to 2 feet per day. A single plant can be more than 200 feet tall, reaching from the seabed to the surface.

Like plants on land, kelp absorbs carbon dioxide, so less of this gas stays in the atmosphere and contributes to climate change. According to scientists, a kelp forest can absorb up to 20 times more carbon dioxide than the same area of forest on land. Kelp pulls the carbon deep underwater, keeping it out of the atmosphere for hundreds or even millions of years.

A rock pigeon

Pigeons like to mix up their methods

Some people say variety is the spice of life, and pigeons seem to agree. In a recent study, scientists presented six pigeons with five buttons on a touch screen. If the birds pecked these buttons five times, in any order, they would be rewarded with a treat.

Once the pigeons got used to performing this task over and over, the researchers expected them to settle on a preferred sequence—perhaps something as simple as pecking the button closest to them five times—and repeat that same pattern every time. Instead, the birds chose chaos. Throughout 30,000 repetitions over eight months, they kept trying different sequences. Some birds seemed to prefer a particular pattern for a while, but then they would change it up later.

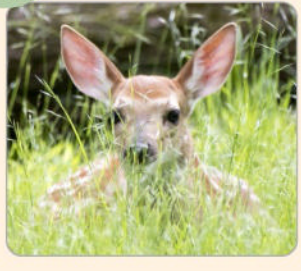
Seeking variety may be a trait that helps pigeons adjust to turbulent city environments. "Maybe it's in their best interest to keep some variability in their behavior," said Ed Wasserman, one of the study authors. "You don't want to be too locked-in because things happen and the world could change."

Animal of the week: Greater capybara

A young capybara named Mozzarella has moved from New Jersey's Cape May County Zoo to join a breeding program at New York's Buffalo Zoo. This will help save the world's largest rodent species, which is native to Central and South America.

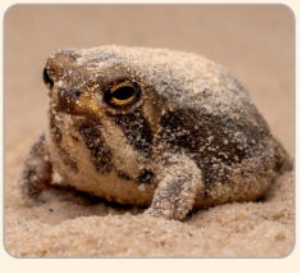
- **LIFESPAN:** 10 years in the wild, 12 in captivity
- **HABITAT:** Swamps and grassy areas near water
- **SIZE:** Up to 2 feet tall and 4.6 feet long
- **DIET:** Grasses and aquatic plants
- **FUN FACT:** They love to swim, soak, and nap with only their eyes, ears, and nostrils above water.

Good week / Bad week



Fawns in Germany

A wildlife rescue organization in southern Germany has begun using heat-detecting drones to find baby deer hidden in tall grass. They rescue the fawns before the grass is mowed so the animals won't get hurt.



Desert rain frogs

The International Union for Conservation of Nature now classifies desert rain frogs as vulnerable. It warns that these African frogs could decline by 20% in the next 10 years if efforts are not made to save them.

GETTY IMAGES (5); ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (3)

Ask an expert: "Why does a caterpillar make a chrysalis?" Sofia, 10, Florida

Chris Hartley
Manager of living collections, Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House

A butterfly has body parts that a caterpillar does not. The chrysalis is the resting stage that gives these parts time to grow. The transformation (metamorphosis) takes a long time because the caterpillar's whole body is rearranged. Some stay in the chrysalis for three to four weeks.

A butterfly emerging from a chrysalis

Do you have a question for an animal expert? Send it to *hello@theweekjunior.com*. Find out about the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House at missouribotanicalgarden.org.

A legendary master of

The author's detective stories have captivated readers for decades.

A love of reading and writing in childhood led Agatha Christie to become one of the most famous and respected mystery writers of all time.

As a child

Early creativity

Agatha Christie was born in England as Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller on September 15, 1890. She was educated at home, and her mother did not want her to learn to read until age 8. But the young girl taught herself at age 5. Her father died when she was 11. Her mother encouraged her to write stories, and her grandmother gave her books as gifts. Christie enjoyed creating plays and characters and had imaginary friends.

THE DAILY NEWS, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1

MRS. CHRISTIE DISGUISED.

DISARM

HANKOW.

THE

A newspaper headline in 1926

Becoming a writer

At age 15, Christie went to a series of boarding schools in Paris, France, to study music. She married a military officer, Archibald Christie, in 1914. As a nurse during World War I (1914–1918), she became an expert in poisons by working in the hospital dispensary—experience that would later prove helpful in her books. She wrote her first detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, on a dare from her sister, who challenged Christie to write a mystery. It was published in 1920 and launched Christie's career. In 1926, after facing personal troubles, Christie disappeared from her home in England. A nationwide search involving hundreds of police officers ensued. After 11 days, she was found in a hotel registered under a false name. The episode contributed to her mysterious reputation.

"I found myself making up stories and acting the parts, and there's nothing like boredom to make you write," Agatha Christie (far right) said of her childhood and how she became a writer.

Famous characters

Agatha Christie created some of the world's most famous detectives in her fiction. Here are a few of her best-known crime solvers.

Hercule Poirot

Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, introduced the world to an eccentric Belgian detective: Hercule Poirot. He went on to appear in more than 30 of Christie's novels and short stories. Actor David Suchet (left) played the character in a long-running British TV series, *Agatha Christie's Poirot*.

BOOKS: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS (6); ALAMY (4); GETTY IMAGES (2); SHUTTERSTOCK; NETFLIX

mystery tales

FLORAL TRIBUTE
A large pink rose with tea-shaped blooms, introduced in 1988, was named in honor of Agatha Christie.

At home in 1950

Finding fame

In 1934, Christie published one of her most famous novels, *Murder on the Orient Express*, which was inspired by her own travels on the famous train through Europe. Throughout the 1930s, she published several more best-selling novels, such as *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *And Then There Were None* (1939). In 1952, Christie's murder-mystery play *The Mousetrap* began a historic run in London's West End. It is still staged there today, making it the world's longest-running play. Christie was also known for her love of world travel and her sense of adventure—she was one of the earliest British women to master stand-up surfing. Christie considered retiring in her 70s but continued writing until a year before her death in 1976 at age 85. She published more than 80 books and 30 plays during her lifetime.

Agatha Christie's Seven Dials

Her legacy

Christie, often called the "Queen of Mystery" or the "Queen of Crime," is the best-selling fiction writer of all time, having sold more than 2 billion books in more than 100 languages. She was known for creating complex plot twists and multidimensional characters that continue to resonate with modern audiences. Her books have been brought to life many times for television and film. Adaptations include the feature films *A Haunting in Venice* and *Death on the Nile*, starring Kenneth Branagh as Hercule Poirot, and the Netflix series *Agatha Christie's Seven Dials*, which made its premiere this year.

Jane Marple

In 1930, Christie introduced readers to Jane Marple, a meddling villager and amateur detective. "Miss Marple" was inspired by Christie's grandmother and her grandmother's friends. Angela Lansbury (left) played her in the film *The Mirror Crack'd*.

The Beresfords

The husband-and-wife team of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, introduced by Christie in 1922, is known for having a quick wit and cracking codes. They were played by James Warwick and Francesca Annis (left) in the British TV series *Partners in Crime*.

DID YOU KNOW?
Scientists have identified at least 21 known species of humans, and Homo sapiens are the only ones that are not extinct.

An artist's model of what Homo floresiensis may have looked like

Early humans scavenged food

Thousands of years ago, a small ancestor of modern humans called Homo floresiensis lived alongside Komodo dragons in Indonesia. According to a new study, these ancient humans got their food by scavenging on leftovers from the Komodo dragons' prey.

H. floresiensis, which stood about 3.5 feet tall, is often referred to as a "hobbit," after the small fictional people created by author J.R.R. Tolkien. The species lived about 50,000 to 100,000 years ago on the island of Flores in Indonesia. It was found in a cave in 2003, near tools and the bones of an extinct elephant relative called a Stegodon.

A Komodo dragon

The Stegodon bones had scratch marks on them, which appeared to come from the tools. This led scientists to conclude that H. floresiensis was intelligent because it was capable of crafting its own tools and using them to hunt large animals, which require complex planning and cooperation.

In the new study, scientists compared marks on the Stegodon bones with bite marks left by a modern Komodo dragon on goat bones. Using a powerful microscope, they could distinguish bite marks, which were shallow and wide, from tool marks, which were straight and deep. The team concluded that most of the marks on the Stegodon bones were left by bites, not tools.

The bite marks were also concentrated around the meatier parts of the Stegodon, indicating that Komodo dragons had first choice of which parts to eat. Marks left by H. floresiensis' tools, however, were mostly near parts of the Stegodon with less meat. This suggested that they were picking over meat left behind by Komodo dragons.

Understanding how H. floresiensis got food helps scientists understand its culture and place in human evolution (development of an animal or plant slowly over time). The species was thought to be closely related to Homo erectus, a fairly advanced human species that most likely hunted. If H. floresiensis did not hunt, however, it may have evolved from an older, less advanced species.

Even if it couldn't hunt, H. floresiensis was still impressive, the study's lead author, Elizabeth Grace Veatch, told *National Geographic*. "The fact that they survived isolated on an island until 50,000 years ago without needing to hunt or use fire to survive speaks volumes," she said.

DNA found in rock art

Collecting cave wall samples

For the first time, scientists recovered prehistoric human DNA (complex chemical that carries instructions for how a living thing should grow and develop) from a cave wall. The finding proves that DNA can last for thousands of years on surfaces like this and gives scientists a glimpse into the lives of early humans.

DNA was found in a red dot made with pigment (substance that gives color) in Escoural Cave in Portugal. Researchers analyzed it and determined that it belonged to a Homo sapiens (modern human) who likely lived between 12,000 and 50,000 years ago. It's not clear how the DNA got there or if it belonged to the artist or an individual who touched the drawing. Four more samples of human DNA were found on unpainted cave walls in Spain and Portugal.

Laughter can help ease lung conditions

Laughter makes people smile and boosts their mood. Now scientists think it can also help with long-term lung conditions. Lungs are part of the body's respiratory (breathing) system. They contain a sticky liquid called phlegm that traps dirt, dust, and bacteria and is pushed out of your lungs when you cough.

More than 35 million people in the US have long-term lung conditions, including 350,000 to 500,000 adults with bronchiectasis. This illness affects the airways and makes it harder to clear phlegm, which can build up and cause infections. People with lung conditions like this are usually treated with medicine, breathing exercises, or special devices that gently vibrate their chest to help them cough.

FACT FILE
During the course of a single day, our lungs pull in about one cup of water in addition to air.

Scientists at King's College London, in the UK, are studying whether laughter can help people cough in the same way that exercises and vibrating devices can. Arietta Spinou, the study's lead author, said she wants to understand the link between laughing, coughing, and clearing the airways.

To find out, the team set up a "laughter lab" and invited people with bronchiectasis to join a six-week program that includes laughter yoga. During this session, people forced themselves to laugh and often ended up laughing for real.

One participant said their lungs already felt better and that laughing with others made the treatment more fun. If the program works, it could help more people with bronchiectasis and other lung conditions.

Scientists are discovering how helpful laughter can be.

An artifact in the game

New art history game created

A new online game called Anthropeum tests people's knowledge of artifacts in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The free game was created by Matthew Chu, a college student at the University of Washington.

Chu used images of more than 492,000 artifacts in the museum's digital collection. Players are presented with 10 new images each day, and they have to try to identify where an object originally came from and when it was created. They guess the artifact's origin by dropping a pin on a world map, then drag a cursor to place it along a timeline.

Players get three clues, and their scores are based on how close they were to the correct answer and how they compared to other players that day. After each guess, they can read a longer description of the artifact. Chu hopes to add objects from other museums in the future.

AMAZING INVENTION

A diving suit for insect rescuers

A "cyborg cockroach"

Scientists have developed a diving suit for "cyborg cockroaches." They hope that one day the insects could be sent on underwater search-and-rescue missions.

Cyborg cockroaches are insects fitted with tiny devices that send electrical pulses to control their movements. They can carry mini-cameras, which help rescue crews look for people who need help in disaster zones that are too dangerous for humans to enter. The diving suits let the insects breathe underwater for up to three hours.

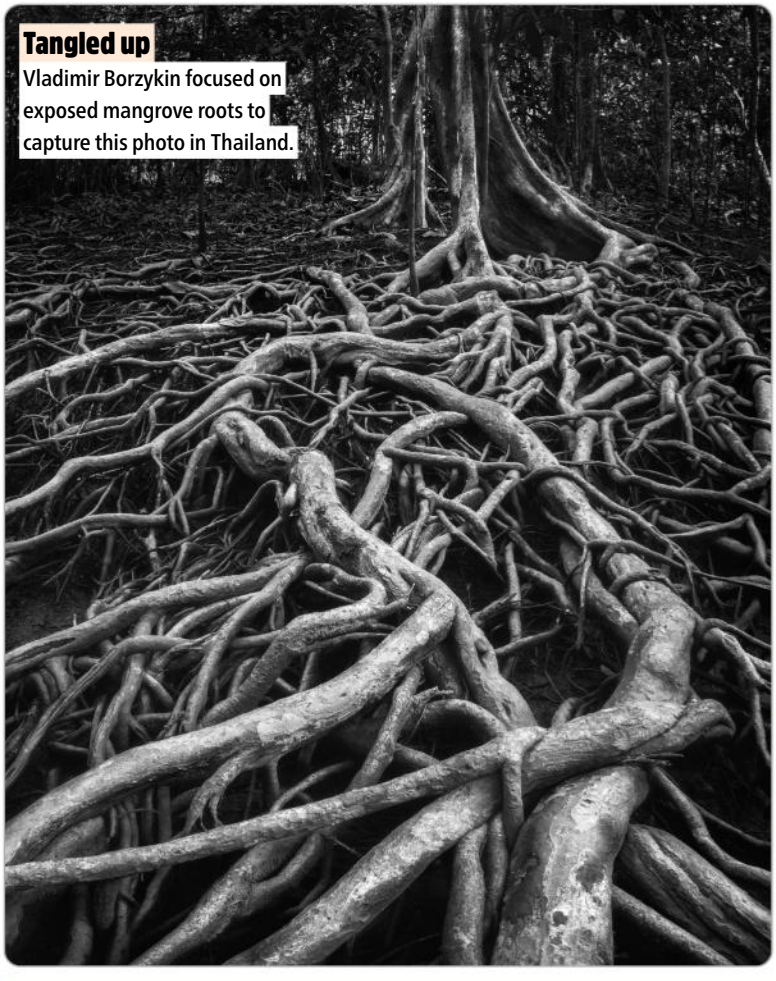
GETTY IMAGES; PUBLIC DOMAIN; NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY; ON LEFT PAGE: KAREN NEOH/WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA; GETTY IMAGES; ALBERTO MARTÍNEZ VILLA

Photos of the week

2026 MANGROVE PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD FINALISTS

Sunny stroll
Mark Ian Cook took this photograph of flamingos in Florida.

Under the sea
In Bonaire, Ewan Tregarot captured this image of gray snappers hunting prey.



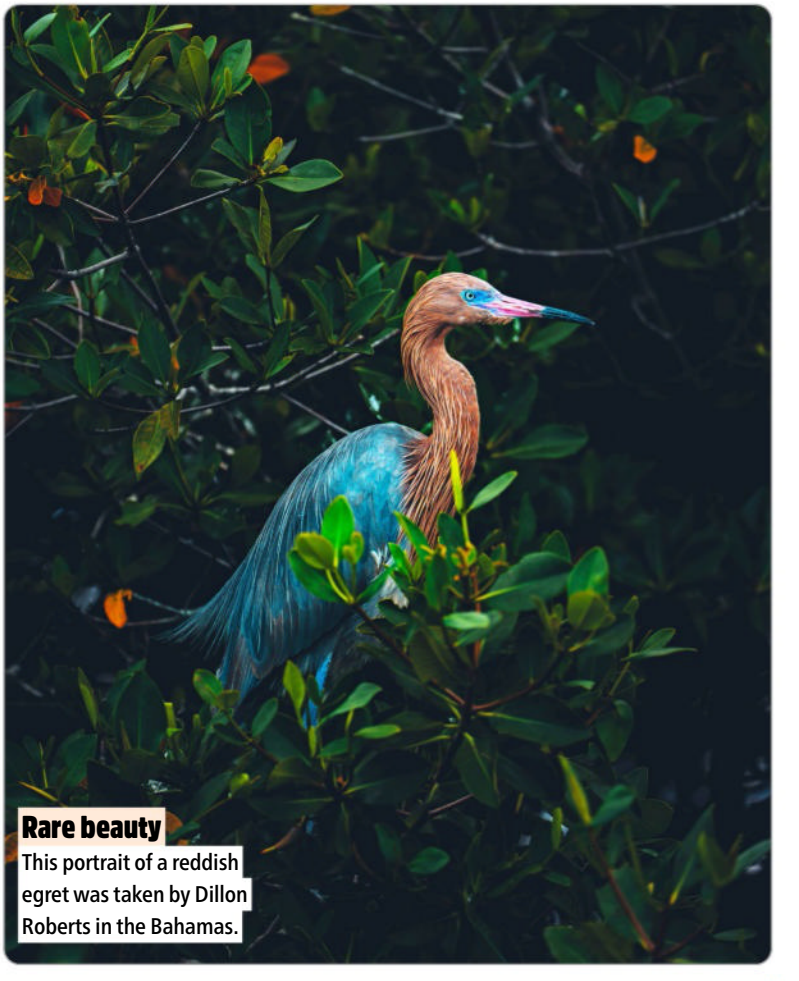
Tangled up
Vladimir Borzykin focused on exposed mangrove roots to capture this photo in Thailand.

Above and below
A turtle in the Bahamas swims past underwater mangrove roots in an image taken by Evan Cooper.

VLADIMIR BORZYKIN; LUCAS GONÇALVES GARCIAS; EWAN TREGAROT; MARK IAN COOK; DILLON ROBERTS; EVAN COOPER

Photos of the week

Scenic shapes
Lucas Goncalves Garcias took this overhead shot of a river in Brazil.



Rare beauty
This portrait of a reddish egret was taken by Dillon Roberts in the Bahamas.

STILL GOING
Current AUSL pro softball players Kathryn Sandercock and Carley Hoover competed in the Little League Softball World Series as kids.

The North Carolina team

Little League softball thriller

From August 2 to August 9, top softball teams from the US and other countries gathered in Greenville, North Carolina, to compete in the Little League Softball World Series (LLSWS). In the final on August 9, Johnston County Little League from Archer Lodge and Clayton, North Carolina, beat Daviess County Little League from Owensboro, Kentucky, 2–0. It was the fourth LLSWS championship title for North Carolina and the first for Johnston County.

The LLSWS tournament began with 12 teams of girls ages 10 to 12. There were eight US teams, plus four that represented Asia-Pacific, Canada, Europe-Africa, and Latin America. They all made the competition by winning regional championships. The teams were divided into two LLSWS brackets, Orange and Purple, and played a double-elimination format (teams were knocked out after two losses) leading up to the final. The overall winner of each bracket advanced to the championship game. For the first time ever, all 22 LLSWS games aired on ESPN's linear television (non-streaming) platforms. The championship game aired nationally on ABC.

Anna-Lynn Clark

Kentucky represented the Central Region and won the Orange bracket, while the North Carolina team won the Purple bracket. Neither team had ever appeared in the LLSWS before, and neither lost any of the four games they played before reaching the final.

North Carolina won the championship with strong pitching and defense. The team scored its first run in the second inning when Belle Cox singled home a runner. In the third, a Kentucky error allowed another runner to score. Spectacular catches by North Carolina right fielder Abbey Robinson and a key play by her teammate, first baseman Scarlett Cerda, helped protect the lead. North Carolina pitcher Anna-Lynn Clark allowed three hits while striking out six batters. In the team's semifinal win less than 24 hours earlier, she had thrown 109 pitches and struck out 11 batters. She had 41 strikeouts across the tournament.

Kentucky pitcher Michaela Knight was also outstanding in the tournament. She finished with an ERA (earned run average, the average number of runs a pitcher allows per six innings) of 0.25.

Pro players in action

On August 5, AUSL (Athletes Unlimited Softball League) players participated in the AUSL Pro Game at the Little League Softball World Series (above). The 24 players were split into teams coached by former Olympic softball players Lisa Fernandez and Natasha Watley. Team Watley won the game, 6–2.

Three days later, the AUSL All-Star Cup began in Rosemont, Illinois. The competition features 45 of the AUSL's best players, who earn points for how well they perform in the 12-game, four-series competition. The player with the most points when it ends on August 30 will be named AUSL All-Star Cup Champion.

RARE VICTORY
The last time a woman other than legend Simone Biles won back-to-back US all-around gymnastics titles was in 2011.

Gymnasts earn top US titles

The 2026 US Gymnastics Championships took place from August 6 to August 9 in Phoenix, Arizona. Two former Olympic medalists won the senior all-around competitions. On the women's side, Hezly Rivera successfully defended her 2025 all-around national title, while the men had a first-time champion, Frederick Richard.

The women's all-around combines scores from the balance beam, floor exercise, uneven bars, and vault. After falling on the bars on the first day of the meet, Rivera began the second day in fourth place. But she was nearly flawless in the rest of her events and beat second-place finisher Claire Pease by 1.15 points. Rivera had an outstanding performance on the beam, which played a big role in her all-around victory. Rivera also won the individual beam title, and Pease narrowly won gold on the uneven bars. Reese Esponda won the floor title, and two-time Olympic gold medalist Jade Carey, who was competing in her hometown, was the vault winner.

The men's all-around features floor, high bar, parallel bars, pommel horse, still rings, and vault. Richard finished more than two points ahead of his closest competitor, Shane Wiskus. Richard won despite receiving deductions for wearing shorts and leggings instead of classic stirrup pants. He said he thinks the more modern look will help gymnastics appeal to more kids.

Richard also won the floor title. The other individual champions were Yul Moldauer on parallel bars, Cooper Kim on high bar, Patrick Hoopes on pommel horse, Asher Cohen on still rings, and Kameron Nelson on vault.

COACH OF THE WEEK

Coach's name: **Ismir (Izzy) Mujkic**

Team: **Pink Lightning (United Youth Soccer Stars)**

"Coach Izzy is always helping us be our best! He knows that it doesn't matter whether we win or lose; it only matters that we gave it our all and had fun. My favorite coach has a joyous personality and is someone I can talk to and trust. He always celebrates our victories, and if we lose, Coach Izzy always suggests new ways we could improve. Because all of this is true, it is as clear as glass that Coach Izzy is the best coach in the whole world!" Henrik, 9, Arizona

To nominate a Coach of the Week, send your coach's name, photo, sport, and team to *hello@theweekjunior.com.* Include your name, age, state, and a few reasons why your coach is great.

MORE BIG MOMENTS

CYCLING

Demi Vollering won the Women's Tour de France, one of the most prestigious races in cycling, which concluded on August 9. She is a Dutch cyclist who rides for team FDJ United-Suez and won the tour in 2023. This year's event was the fifth edition of the women's competition. The race began on August 1 and covered more than 730 miles across nine stages. Vollering won three stages, including the last one. She finished 1 minute and 18 seconds ahead of her longtime rival and the 2024 race champion, Polish rider Katarzyna Niewiadoma-Phinney of team Canyon-Sram.

SOCCER

On August 9, in the Leagues Cup, a competition between teams from MLS (Major League Soccer) and Mexico's Liga MX, the Philadelphia Union beat Necaxa, 3–1. Cavan Sullivan, a 16-year-old rising star for the Union, scored a goal and assisted for another in the win. This was his fourth career goal for the team. Meanwhile, in the NWSL (National Women's Soccer League) on August 8, Kansas City Current midfielder Debinha (she goes by one name) scored the 83rd goal of her career and broke the record for the most career goals by a NWSL player. The historic moment came in the 44th minute of a 1–1 draw with the Houston Dash. Current midfielder Croix Bethune got the assist on Debinha's goal.

GETTY IMAGES (4); ON LEFT PAGE: COURTESY OF LITTLE LEAGUE SOFTBALL WORLD SERIES; THEAUSLOFFICIAL/IG; COURTESY OF LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL

WOW!
More than 500 million books by Enid Blyton have been sold around the world, and more than one is sold every minute in the UK.

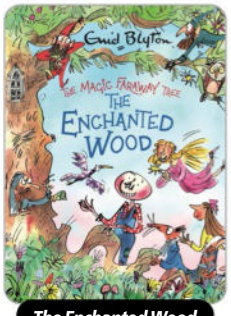
The Magic Faraway Tree

Whimsical film based on books

In *The Magic Faraway Tree*, siblings have adventures in an enchanted wood.

A popular film based on a classic best-selling book series by British author Enid Blyton is coming to theaters. *The Magic Faraway Tree*, which was a hit when it was released in the UK and other countries this spring, opens on August 21. It is a fantastical story involving three siblings who visit a wondrous world. Actor Andrew Garfield, who plays the kids' father, called it "a beautiful film about family and about love, imagination, and reconnecting with the things that matter in this life."

The first *Magic Faraway Tree* book, *The Enchanted Wood*, was published in 1939. There were originally three books in the series, which grew to include more works by Blyton and other authors, including books published in 2022 and 2023.



The Enchanted Wood

The film was written by Simon Farnaby, who also wrote *Wonka* and *Paddington 2*. He based it on the story from *The Enchanted Wood* and parts of other books but made several changes, including setting the story in the present day. In the movie, Polly and Tim Thompson and their kids—grouchy Beth, quiet Fran, and video-game-obsessed Joe—relocate from London to the countryside after Polly loses her job. Tim plans to become a tomato farmer, and they move into a house with no electricity. When they meet their landlord (played by Farnaby) and his wife, they learn they are near an enchanted wood. After receiving a note from a fairy, Silky, inviting her to visit, Fran finds a magical tree, enters it, and ends up in a world with inhabitants such as Moonface and Saucepan Man. Fran soon convinces her siblings to visit, which leads to unexpected consequences.

The movie's magic tree, an oak, was built over several months by the film's greens department. It was based on real trees, and there were living flowers at its base. A different land arrives on the top of the tree each day, and the film includes visits to the candy-filled Land of Goodies and the Land of Birthdays, where wishes come true.

Much of the film is set in the tree's world, but director Ben Gregor said the story is about "doing things in real life." For the Thompsons, that also means spending time together and uniting to support Tim and his business. "Everything's on screen these days, and to go and have real experiences in nature and in places you haven't been before—that makes you feel alive," Gregor said. "What we wanted to do with *The Magic Faraway Tree* is to remind you that it's a good idea to go out and have some fun."

About the author

The Magic Faraway Tree author Enid Blyton (above) lived from 1897 to 1968. She was born in London, UK, but spent most of her life in the English countryside. Before becoming an author, she worked as a teacher. Through the years, she wrote about 700 books and 2,000 short stories. She once said, "My love of children is the whole foundation of all my work."

While many people love Blyton's stories, her work has also been criticized for certain depictions of some races and ethnicities. The publisher of her books has made edits to revise portions that could be considered offensive.

Among Blyton's most popular book series are *Malory Towers*, about girls at a boarding school, and *The Famous Five*, an adventure series about kids and their cousin. Both have been made into TV series in recent years.

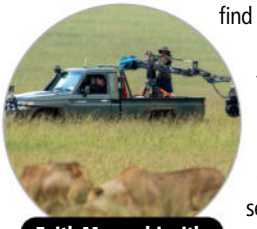
FURRY FACT
Lion cubs are born with spots and rosettes on their fur coats that help them hide from predators.

Two males in *Lion*

A real-life lion king story

The 2019 film *The Lion King*, directed by Jon Favreau, was a photorealistic version of the beloved tale of a cub who eventually becomes the leader of his pride. Now the transformation of a real-life lion, named Kio, from cub to young adult is coming to TV. *Lion,* a four-part National Geographic documentary series, is executive-produced by Favreau and natural history producer Mike Gunton. It arrives on Disney+ and Hulu on August 20.

Faith Musembi, a producer and director on the series, told *The Week Junior* that before filming, the team researched prides in Kenya and Tanzania and worked with scientists who were familiar with specific lions and their lives. Musembi said that since the animals often sleep a lot or are nocturnal, the team narrowed their options to ones that were likely to be active during the day.


Faith Musembi with a camera in a truck

They selected a pride in Kenya led by Summer, Kio's mother. The plan was to focus on the whole pride, including older cubs, but young Kio stood out. Although life can be dangerous for little lions, Musembi said, "We kept coming back, and the cub was still there." As he grew, they saw him slowly find his place among the older males.

Nature documentaries often follow subjects for short periods of time, but Kio was filmed over four years. "When you see the first frame of him as a cute little cub, then you see him when he's huge, you have that appreciation of, wow, he's gone on a journey," Musembi said. She hopes the series will help people learn about lions' shrinking habitats and will also share a message about finding where you belong: "Stay how you are because that's what's special about you," she said. "You'll find the people who appreciate that."

READER RECOMMENDS

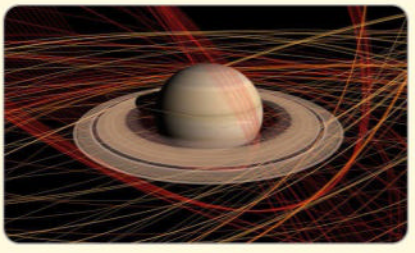
We Baby Bears *(HBO Max)*
"Three bears—a grizzly, a panda, and a polar bear—get kicked out of their apartment for making too much noise. They wish upon a star, and when a star falls from the sky and lands on a box they have, it becomes magical and able to teleport them. The bears can't choose where they go, so every time they land somewhere, they have a crazy adventure. In the second season, they revisit some old friends from other episodes. When they come to a new place, they always fix a problem or learn something. This is a really funny show with one big plot twist at the end of season one." Mariel, 8, New Jersey

Do you have a film or TV show to recommend to other kids? Send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

3 MORE PICKS TO ENJOY THIS WEEK

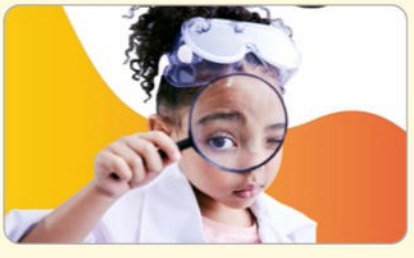
WATCH: CAMP ROCK 3

Disney's first two *Camp Rock* musical movies came out in 2008 and 2010 and starred singer-actors Demi Lovato and the Jonas Brothers (above) as young musicians at a summer camp. The new sequel follows campers competing to become the opening act for the group the brothers' characters formed when they were younger. (Disney+)



CLICK: NASA'S EYES

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory created this 3D interactive website filled with NASA data and images. You can explore our solar system and beyond, follow spacecraft on more than 100 missions, watch changes to Earth's climate, and get a sneak peek at alien star systems and distant exoplanets light-years away. (eyes.nasa.gov)



LISTEN: THE CONVERSATION'S CURIOUS KIDS

In each episode of this award-winning podcast, experts answer kids' questions about science, nature, history, and space. In the recently released second season, topics include why fingers are different lengths and whether whales fart. (Major podcast platforms)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/SIMON BLAKENEY; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/ABIGAIL BROWN; CARTOON NETWORK; DISNEY/DAVID ASTORGA; NASA; THE CONVERSATION US; ON LEFT PAGE: VERTICAL; BOOK: COURTESY OF PUBLISHER; GETTY IMAGES

Book club

THIS WEEK'S BOOK

The Hungry Forest

By Kaela Rivera

Twelve-year-old Ryan and his younger brother, Teddy, go to school across the street from a dense forest where many people have disappeared for decades. Before their father died, his number-one rule was not to enter the forest.

Their father, a search-and-rescue volunteer, had a box of notes about the woodland that Teddy secretly began looking through. When Ryan found it, he was furious.

One day during Ryan's track practice, Teddy wandered in front of the woods. As Ryan takes off to drag him back to school, they hear their father's voice echoing through the trees. Ryan hesitates for a minute, then sprints in while calling, "I'm coming, Dad!"

Ryan hasn't been able to track his dad's voice since he entered the woods, but he notices someone shuffling nearby—Teddy! Ryan becomes upset that Teddy didn't stay behind.

Inside the forest, the brothers soon encounter a mystical world where grotesque creatures attempt to capture them. They need to find a way to escape before sunrise or they'll become trees—and be stuck in the woods for eternity.

Full of twists and turns, this horror novel delivers scares while the adventure helps the boys overcome their differences. *Ages 9–13*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Would you have entered the woods if you were Ryan? Explain.

In what ways does Teddy show bravery?

How does the relationship between the brothers change with the story?

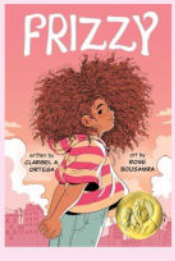
What do you think the main turning point of the book is?

Which part of the story is the scariest?

Were you satisfied with the conclusion? Why or why not?

Find your next great read

If you liked…



Frizzy
By Claribel A. Ortega, illustrated by Rose Bousamra
In this graphic novel, Marlene, a Dominican girl who has thick, curly hair, gets it straightened every weekend. She hates being in the salon. What will it take for her to embrace her curls? ***Ages 9–13***

You might like…

Curlfriends: New in Town
By Sharee Miller
At Charlie's new middle school, it hasn't been easy to make friends. Then she meets the Curlfriends, a group of Black girls she thinks might encourage her to be her true self. This is the first book in a graphic novel series. ***Ages 8–12***

Guess the book this quote comes from

"The plain truth can be the hardest thing to see when it's about yourself. If you don't want to know the truth, you'll do anything to disguise it."

Hint: This book is told from alternating points of view from two characters.

Answer: *Pax* by Sara Pennypacker. In this quote, Vola, a military veteran, shares her wisdom with Peter, who has been forced to return his pet fox, Pax, to the wild but then sets out to find him.

THIS WEEK'S AUTHOR

Kaela Rivera

Award-winning author Kaela Rivera is known for middle-grade novels that blend fantasy with mythology and Mexican folklore. She often focuses on the themes of family and identity in her work, including her *Cece Rios* trilogy, which follows a young girl who discovers she has healing abilities.

What inspired *The Hungry Forest*?

I love to study Mexican mask folk art, and I enjoyed playing indie horror games with my nephews. I also grew up among the Appalachian forests of Tennessee, where you know and respect the power of the forest. One day I was doodling pictures of different masks that I think are cool, and then I was thinking about the forest. The ideas came together in my mind at the same time to write this book.

Was the forest based on a real forest?

Yes. There was one state park where I got lost for a little while. It looked like there were eyes in some of the trees. Then I suddenly noticed that all the trees had multiple "eyes"—which were of course just parts of the tree—and it felt like the forest was staring at me!

What can kids take away from Ryan and Teddy's adventure?

You may think you have to be a certain way because you need to have the "right" look or image and that people will only like you or appreciate you if you can control how they see you. One of my big focuses was the importance of resisting that toxic perfectionism and truly connecting with each other.

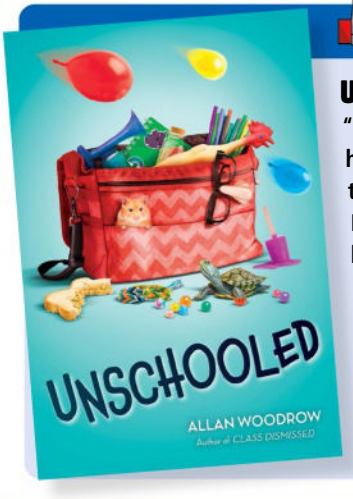
Where did you like to read as a child?

I loved reading when I was growing up, and I wanted to escape into a place that felt as busy, big, and adventurous as my own mind. I used to find trees to climb and read in them.

What's special about this time of year?

I love all the back-to-school supplies. I get so excited when I see the new composition notebooks and sharpened pencils. It's a fresh start and a reminder that every time you learn a new fact or skill, it's like opening the door to a whole new world inside you and expands who you are in a really profound way.

Reader recommends



Unschooled *By Allan Woodrow*

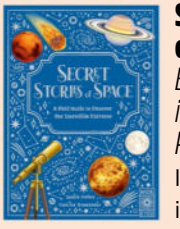
"Fifth graders George and Lilly are best friends, and they have been looking forward to Spirit Week all year. But they were put on different teams—Team Red and Team Blue. The week begins with Lilly accidentally spilling her breakfast on George. Then there are sabotaged costumes, slimed lockers, and class pets held hostage. If Principal Klein finds out, Spirit Week will be canceled. Can George and Lilly get the kids to stop doing pranks, or will this Spirit Week be the worst ever?" Eva, 11, Virginia

Do you have a book to recommend? We want to hear about it! With an adult's help, please send your review to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

3 new books for aspiring astronauts

Blast into reading these fascinating nonfiction stories about space.

History Smashers: The Space Race
By Kate Messner
In May 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced that the United States would put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. But the race between America and the Soviet Union had already started, and the US was far behind. Using comic panels, black-and-white illustrations, and fun sidebars, this paperback packs a big punch. *Ages 8–12*



Secret Stories of Space
By Saskia Gwinn, illustrated by Vasilisa Romanenko
In this beautifully illustrated book, you'll learn the secrets of stars, planets, and space rocks. For instance, you'll discover that you can see about 6,000 stars from Earth, but the Milky Way galaxy contains hundreds of billions. A glossary helps explain concepts like magnetic field and radio waves. *Ages 10+*

Sound Explorers: Space Adventure
By Anna Claybourne, foreword by Phil Plait, illustrated by Teo Georgiev
You can hear real noises recorded in space with this 20-button sound book. Sounds include the beep of Sputnik 1 (the first satellite sent into orbit), the launch of a space shuttle, and the boom of a black hole. The book also has fun facts and stunning illustrations. *Ages 8+*

Find out more about *The Week Junior* Book Club and check out our previous titles at kids.theweekjunior.com/bookclub.

BOOKS: COURTESY OF PUBLISHERS; AUTHOR: JOANNE PARSONS; GETTY IMAGES

BACK TO SCHOOL 2026

WOW! The record for the largest collection of erasers was set in Germany by Petra Engel, who has 19,571 erasers she began collecting at age 9.

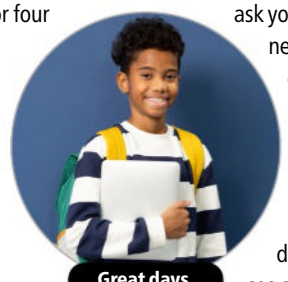
Get set for a new school year

Be prepared for a smooth start with these tips.

The beginning of a new grade is an opportunity for a fresh start—you get to take new classes, meet different classmates, and explore fun activities during and outside school. Whether classes have just begun or you're about to have your first day, now is a great time to think about what you can do to set yourself up for a positive experience. Here's how to get started.

Identify new goals

Think about what you might like to accomplish this school year. Write down a list of three or four goals, and talk to a family member or a teacher about how to accomplish them. The goals could be social (join one new activity), academic (read two new books a month), or athletic (improve your one-mile run time). A goal can also be something personal. Check in on your goals throughout the year to see how you're doing.



Great days are ahead!

Create a homework station

Having a dedicated place to study after school can help you feel more productive. Ask your family to help you set up a study spot at home, such as in your bedroom, the kitchen, or the living room, with a table or a desk and a comfortable chair. You can also add a few personal touches, like artwork you've made or a framed picture of a pet or a vacation memory, to make it feel more like your own special space.

Round up supplies

Before buying new items, look around your home to see what you still have from last year. You may find that you have enough pens and pencils, for example, or you can simply remove used pages from a notebook you barely opened. After you gather what you have, ask your family for help getting what you still need. Store all your supplies in a desk drawer or a small basket so they are on hand when you need them.

Write down important dates

A planner or calendar is a simple way to stay on top of your class schedule, due dates, and appointments. Being able to see at a glance what you have coming up in the following days or weeks can also help you plan out your time and keep you from forgetting anything. You can use a paper wall calendar, a notebook planner, or an electronic calendar on a phone or tablet. The best system is the one that works for you! To feel organized for each day ahead, consider using a daily checklist like the one, at right, in the box.

Next-day checklist

To help mornings go smoothly, make a list of quick tasks to accomplish the night before. Keep the list on a whiteboard or in a notes app, then check off the items each day. Some examples:

- ✔ Complete homework
- ✔ Get school forms signed by a parent or guardian
- ✔ Clean out backpack
- ✔ Charge device, like a tablet or laptop
- ✔ Lay out next day's outfit
- ✔ Make lunch for tomorrow
- ✔ Fill water bottle
- ✔ Put musical instrument or sports equipment by the door
- ✔ Take a shower
- ✔ Set morning alarm
- ✔ Read to wind down

DID YOU KNOW?
Washi tape, a crafting material that originated in Japan, is made of rice paper.

Decorate notebooks with colorful tape

What you need

- Washi tape in assorted colors and sizes
- Solid-colored notebooks or journals
- Scissors
- Black permanent marker (optional)

Instructions

1. To make stripes: Cut pieces of tape that are a little longer than the notebook. Stick them to the front, folding the extra over the cover.
2. To make a burger: Cut a piece of yellow tape that's a few inches long to make the top of the bun. Place it on your notebook. Next, add slightly smaller strips of washi tape for other items on your burger, like pickles, lettuce, tomato, and meat. Snip tiny rectangles to make sesame seeds for the top bun. Spell out your name in tape letters, too.
3. To make flowers: For tulips, overlap short pieces of tape to form V shapes. Make daisies by criss-crossing 3 or 4 pieces of tape. Add long strips of green tape for stems and diamond-shaped green pieces for the leaves.
4. To make a dog design: Place one long strip of tape on the notebook for the animal's body. Add 2 thinner pieces, overlapping at an angle, to make the snout. Add a small square for the head. Cut thin pieces of tape to make the tail and legs, then cut a rectangle with one slanted edge for the ear. Cut small black squares for the nose and eye, or use a marker to draw on those details.

LIFE HACK FEEL LESS AWKWARD

Most people have moments when they feel uncomfortable in social situations. There are a few strategies you can try to help you feel less awkward. First, it may seem silly, but it can help to rehearse speaking in front of a mirror, smiling, and saying "hi." Practice saying hi to other kids on the school bus or in the hallway. Be proud of your efforts to engage, even if you don't always get a response. You may also find you'll feel more naturally at ease among people who enjoy the same things you do. Check out an after-school club or a recreational sports team as a low-pressure way to gain confidence. You can also talk to a school counselor or a trusted adult about how you feel.

Start with a simple "hi!"

JODI LEVINE FOR SUPERMAKEIT; GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

Puzzles

Crisscross

Each of these things found in a kitchen fits into this grid. Can you find where each one goes to complete the grid?

3 letters
CUP
WOK

4 letters
FORK

5 letters
CORER
SIEVE

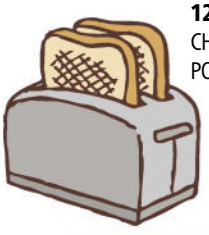
6 letters
TRIVET

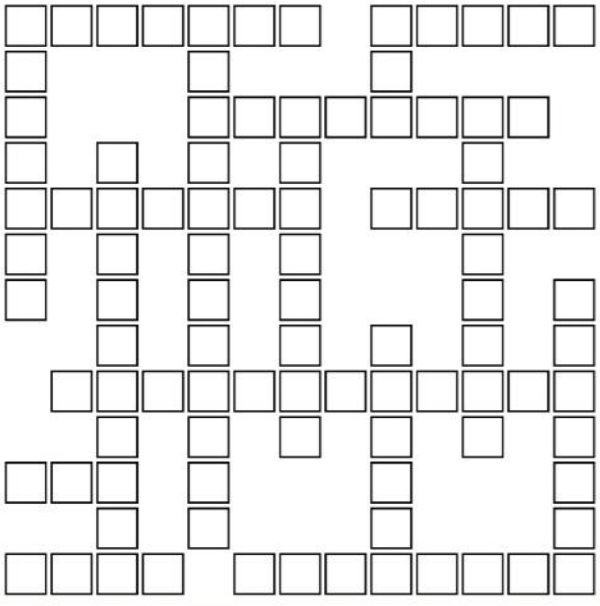
7 letters
CAKE PAN
COASTER
SCRAPER
TOASTER

8 letters
AIR FRYER
EGG TIMER
OVEN MITT
TEASPOON

10 letters
SALT SHAKER

12 letters
CHEESE GRATER
POTATO PEELER





Take five

Five 5-letter words that can precede the word "potato" are hidden in this grid. For each one, the first letter is somewhere in the first column, the second is somewhere in the second column, and so on. Can you find all five?

B	O	A	E	O
I	O	K	H	T
R	W	A	S	D
C	D	E	C	T
S	A	U	E	H

ALL THE SAME

Each answer contains the letters S-U-N. Those letters have been placed for you. Can you figure out the words? (NEED A HINT? Check the bottom of the page.)

1. Ice cream treat with whipped cream — SUN ☐ ☐ ☐
2. Company that makes Galaxy phones — ☐ ☐ ☐ SUN ☐
3. Tidal wave caused by an earthquake — ☐ SUN ☐ ☐ ☐
4. Undersea, like lost treasure — SUN ☐ ☐ ☐
5. German saying after a sneeze — ☐ ☐ SUN ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 29.

SUDOKU

To complete the grid, place the numbers from 1 to 6 exactly once in each row, column, and 2x3 bold-lined box.

1				2	
5			4		
		4		1	
	1		3		
		2			6
	6				4

Spot the difference

These two pictures of a caterpillar appear to be the same, but take a closer look. There are actually five differences. Can you see them?

PUZZLES BY PUZZABILITY

All the same hint: Answer 5 begins with G.

A very muddy tournament

Most soccer matches take place on grassy fields, but some athletes prefer mud. Last month, about 150 teams from several countries competed at the annual Swamp Soccer World Championships in Hyrynsalmi, Finland. The sludgy sport was inspired by Finnish cross-country skiers who challenged themselves by training in swamps. Today, players pass and score while sinking into muck. Conditions are so tough that each half of the match lasts only about 10 minutes and teams are allowed unlimited substitutions.

Record for underwater push-ups

Kamal Kaloi, a yoga instructor in Vietnam, has earned a world record by doing the most underwater push-ups with a single breath. After training for two years, Kaloi developed the ability to hold his breath for up to six minutes. He said yoga helped him achieve this goal, and in 2020, he set a record by doing 21 underwater yoga poses in a row. For the new title, Kaloi completed 86 push-ups without stopping to breathe. He still plans to attempt more underwater feats, including walking and weightlifting.

Ryans ride a roller coaster

Calling all Ryans, Rians, and Rhyans! About 2,000 people with this name met at the Mall of America in Minnesota for a two-day event organized by Ryan Meetup, a group that brings together Ryans from across the country. One agenda item was to set a record for the most same-named people riding a roller coaster. The Ryans took over the Pepsi Orange Streak ride, which was nicknamed the "Ryan Coaster" during the stunt. "It's awesome to be part of," one Ryan told the *Minnesota Star Tribune*. "I love my name."

A marinara-infused manicure

For those who want to add some zest to their manicures, the Ragu sauce brand has teamed up with Chillhouse nail studio to introduce a line of sauce-infused press-on nails. The Saucy Summer collaboration features three nail sets, each containing a spoonful of tomato sauce from one of Ragu's classic flavors, which gives the polish a glossy red color and a subtle scent. But the creators don't recommend tasting the pasta sauce press-ons, saying they're just for show. Is this story true, or are lies simmering beneath its surface?*

*Fake! Ragu and Chillhouse did collaborate on a line of press-on nails, but no actual sauce was used. The designs were merely inspired by Ragu's tomato sauce, with one showing tiny pasta shapes on a red background.

SHUTTERSTOCK; GETTY IMAGES (2); GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS; MALL OF AMERICA/FACEBOOK; RAGU; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (3)

Editor's note

You may have heard of Fat Bear Week—the tournament held each fall to choose the bulkiest of the brown bears who are chowing down on salmon in Alaska's Katmai National Park as they prepare for their long winter hibernation. That event began in 2014, and now there's a new competition to capture your attention. The first-ever Fat Marmot Week will take place in Colorado this month (p5). Marmots are a large squirrel species, and yellow-bellied marmots are the only marmots native to the state. They gain weight by feasting on flowers and grasses before hibernating—in fact, the animals may double their size—and the lineup of eight contenders is indeed impressive. You can see them at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-FatMarmot. Voting begins on August 24, and the winner will be named on August 29. We'll be watching closely and will report on the mightiest marmot in a future issue.

Andrea Barbalich
Editorial Director

CHARITY OF THE WEEK

The Nature Conservancy

This organization's goal is to conserve land and water that people and nature depend on. It works with communities around the world to help them make environmentally friendly decisions about their land, such as planting trees in forests. Since the group's founding in 1951, it has protected more than 125 million acres of land and 160,000 square miles of ocean. Find out more at nature.org.

The Nature Conservancy

A haircut to help others

"During my birthday month this year, I cut off 11 inches of my hair and donated it to Wigs for Kids. This organization helps children who have lost their hair. I was excited to do something kind that could make another child feel happy and confident. A week after my donation, I was thrilled to receive my certificate from Wigs for Kids. It made me feel proud that I could help someone in a small but meaningful way."

Rukmini, 8, Virginia

Have you done something interesting or raised money for a cause you care about? Whatever you're up to, we want to hear about it at *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

What kind of coat do you put on wet?

A coat of paint

Writing contest for kids!

Do you love creating imaginative stories? If so, enter the Spooky Stories Writing Contest, sponsored by Abrams, the publisher of best-selling author Jeff Kinney. Select one of the spooky writing prompts, and then develop an original story of up to 1,000 words. The grand prize winner will have their story published in a future issue of *The Week Junior*. Submissions will be judged by Kinney and *The Week Junior's* editorial director, Andrea Barbalich. The deadline to enter is September 14. Get the prompts and more at spooky.abrams.link.

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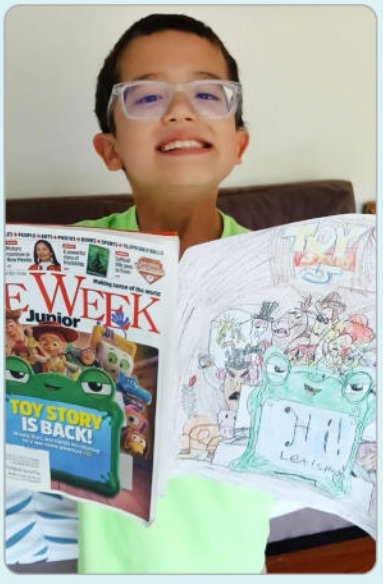
THE WEEK Junior IT'S YOUR TURN Email your news, views, and photos to *hello@theweekjunior.com.*

Your turn

YOUR PHOTOS

We'd love to see pictures you've taken or pictures with you in them! Have an adult email them to us at *hello@theweekjunior.com*, along with anything you would like us to know about what's happening in the photo.



"I was inspired by *The Week Junior* to draw a picture of the front of the Toy Story 5 issue!"
Jack, 10, New York

"I made the Cali roll rice bowl! It was delicious and easy to make."
Allison, 9, Virginia

"We found the Texas Golden Boot—the gold cleat with a spur that was featured in Issue 316."
Hayes, 10, Texas

Teacher OF THE WEEK

Teacher name: **Mrs. Lauren Martin**

School: **East Elementary**

"Mrs. Martin is the best teacher because she makes learning super fun and has a great method of teaching. Mrs. Martin always has a new game or book ready for us each day. Best of all, she does cartwheels on our birthdays! One time, she let us have a dance party when we all got good scores on our tests. Mrs. Martin encourages us and helps us when we're down or having trouble." Elizabeth, 10, Ohio

Nominate your teacher for Teacher of the Week!
Send your reason for the nomination, a photo of your teacher, and your school's name and address to *hello@theweekjunior.com*.

GETTY IMAGES; ON LEFT PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

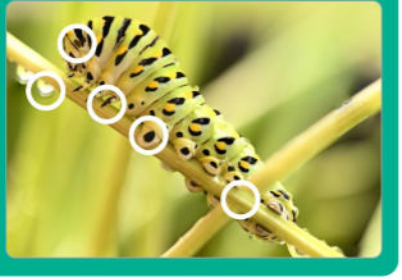
Puzzle answers (from page 26)

C	A	K	E	P	A	N		C	O	R	E	R		
O			O			U								
A			T	E	A	S	P	O	O	N				
S		S	A		I			V						
T	O	A	S	T	E	R		S	I	E	V	E		
E		L	O		F			N						
R		T	P		R			M		S				
		S	E	Y		T		I		C				
	C	H	E	E	S	E	G	R	A	T	E	R		
		A		L		R		I		T		A		
W	O	K		E				V				P		
		E		R				E				E		
F	O	R	K		E	G	G	T	I	M	E	R		

Take five
baked
Idaho
roast
couch
sweet

All the same
1. sundae
2. Samsung
3. tsunami
4. sunken
5. gesundheit

1	4	6	5	2	3
5	2	3	4	6	1
2	3	4	6	1	5
6	1	5	3	4	2
4	5	2	1	3	6
3	6	1	2	5	4



Quiz answers (from page 30)
1 b) Mozzarella **2** True **3** a) North Carolina **4** c) Yellow-bellied **5** The Enchanted Wood **6** False. It is about 3.6 million° F hotter. **7** c) Ryan **8** Sunrise **9** False. It is the largest. **10** b) 2,400 **11** Kio **12** b) 1934 **13** True. **14** Komodo dragons **15** a) Chicago

We want to hear from you! To have your letters, photos, nominations, recommendations, or ideas considered for inclusion in the magazine, please include your first name, age, and state with your submission. By emailing your submission to us, you give *The Week Junior* consent to publish it in the magazine and online. Please get your parent/guardian's permission before sending anything to us.

How much of this week's news can you remember?

1 A capybara with what "cheesy" name recently joined a breeding program at the Buffalo Zoo?

a) Cheddar b) Mozzarella

c) Parmesan

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

2 True or false? A recent study indicated that laughter can help to ease long-term lung conditions.

True ☐ False ☐

3 A team from which US state won the 2026 Little League Softball World Series?

a) North Carolina b) South Carolina

c) Kentucky

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

4 Fat Marmot Week will celebrate which type of marmot?

a) Alpine b) Olympic c) Yellow-bellied

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

5 What was the title of the first book in the *Magic Faraway Tree* series?

6 True or false? The Sun's corona is about 3,600,000° F cooler than its surface.

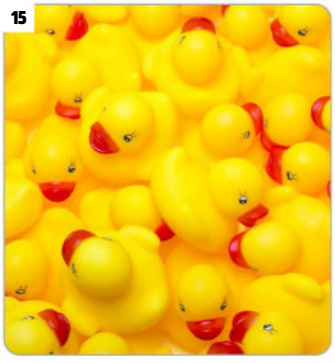
True ☐ False ☐

7 About 2,000 people with what first name recently gathered at the Mall of America in Minnesota?

a) Richard b) Rob c) Ryan

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

8 In the book *The Hungry Forest*, the brothers need to escape the forest before what time of day?



ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 29.

9 True or false? The sunflower sea star is the smallest known species of starfish.

True ☐ False ☐

10 Kelsey Pfendler recently completed a solo rowing trip of about how many miles?

a) 240

b) 2,400

c) 24,000

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

11 What is the name of the lion whose transformation to adulthood is featured in the new National Geographic documentary series *Lion*?

12 In what year did Agatha Christie publish her famous novel *Murder on the Orient Express*?

a) 1920 b) 1934

c) 1952

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

13 True or false? Two former Olympic medalists won the senior all-around competitions at the 2026 US Gymnastics Championships.

True ☐ False ☐

14 A recent study found that the ancient human ancestor Homo floresiensis ate meat left behind by what animals?

15 On August 6, thousands of rubber ducks were dumped into which river?

a) Chicago

b) Ohio

c) Rio Grande

a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

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BOLD BUG

Ruddy darter dragonflies live near shallow bodies of water across Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. Females are yellowish, and males are bright red.

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